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SUBJECT: FRANCE: MFA ON DEVELOPMENT, GOVERNANCE, STABILITY
AND RECONSTRUCTION

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Econ Counselor and Econoff met February 14 with Jerome Walter, Counselor to Minister Delegate for Cooperation and Development Brigitte Girardin, and Herve Magro, Deputy Director for Governance in the MFA's General Directorate for International Cooperation and Development, to take stock of recent changes in French development policy. Magro is generating a strategy paper for the GOF on dealing with fragile states and post-conflict reconstruction. He said France was unlikely to stand up an inter-ministerial organization modeled after S/CRS or the UK's PCRU, and that his concern instead was in ensuring that government actors were operating on similar assumptions -- and in common information environments -- in conflict/post-conflict situations. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Walter confirmed that in several respects French development policy continued along a well-trod path. France continued to focus attention on numerical targets, and was on track to meet its Millennium Development Goal target of .5% of GDP in 2007. Given the stringent budget picture and the eventual end of debt forgiveness as a major component of Official Development Assistance, he admitted to some concern about funding to meet future targets however. Though aid was recognized as legitimate use of public funds by the French, polls indicated that public opinion was prone to question the efficiency and utility of aid. Asked to comment on a February 13 op-ed in French daily Le Monde charging that much of the increase in French aid had been a chimera, Walter and Magro acknowledged some disgruntlement in the NGO community. In order to reach spending targets the GOF was having to channel more of its ODA through international organizations. This was particularly true with health-related spending.

¶3. (SBU) The Chirac airline ticket tax dedicated to UNITAID was expected to produce about 200M euros this year, and Walter claimed there had been no signs of negative effects on air travel. Development policy had also taken on board global warming, particularly in water management projects and planning for effects on biodiversity as humans and animals migrate due to climate change. Africa remained the focus for bilateral aid, and the GOF was on the whole satisfied that EU development policy reflected a consensus in which its views were taken into account. Asked about plans in Afghanistan, Magro and Walter listed a number of ongoing or completed projects, including in cotton production and health. But although Afghanistan had been added to the list of "priority zone" countries for French development assistance, more robust involvement was not in the cards. French added-value was particularly strong in francophone Africa, and that would remain the priority.

¶3. (SBU) With the adoption of a new interagency policy on democratic governance approved in December, Magro noted that French thinking on this issue had matured after years of

interagency discussion. Magro's office is responsible both for formulating and executing policy in this area, of which he provided an overview. In contrast to the U.S., which saw governance largely as the application of basic principles of good management, Magro said the French approach was increasingly to reach out to local actors and incorporate indigenous cultural and social mores into an effective approach to good governance. The resulting view stressed both the importance of strengthening and legitimizing the state on the one hand, and of promoting the development of social capital and civil society capacity on the other. This was an inherently "political" process, which did not allow for a template that could be easily applied to all cases. He contrasted the French approach in particular to the recent emphasis of the World Bank on anti-corruption, which he claimed had virtually excluded other aspects of governance. France had publicly taken issue with this approach.

14. (SBU) Magro also noted that his office had responsibility for looking at stability and reconstruction issues for the Minister Delegate for Cooperation, and said he was in the process of drafting a strategy paper that would outline a more systematic approach to the issue. Coordination and cooperation with the Ministry of Defense in particular would be a challenge. But Magro thought it unlikely that France would follow the U.S. or UK model of establishing an inter-agency structure incorporating representatives of different ministries in permanent structures. The MFA had a well-developed sense of how to manage short-term crises, and was beginning to think through the challenges of rapidly delivering critical services in a post-conflict environment with an eye toward ensuring long-term stability and development. He cited policing and the judiciary as examples of key functions that needed to be quickly delivered to prevent the re-emergence of conflict.

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15. (SBU) Comment: If there was concern about the impending departure of President Chirac--whose personal engagement has strongly marked the French development agenda for the past ten years--our interlocutors did not share it with us. On governance, France's approach leaves it a great deal of room to maneuver, and we will need to look to specific examples to determine what this may mean in practice. Magro's skepticism about an S/CRS-type mechanism for France echoes what we've been hearing here for some time. Although Ambassador Pierre-Andre Wiltzer was appointed "High Representative for Security and Conflict Prevention" in 2004, in practice his mandate has been narrowly focused on peacekeeping and demilitarization issues. As the French begin to grapple with possible adjustments to the way in which they manage post-conflict situations, we should look for opportunities to engage with them. Magro in particular expressed a strong interest in meeting with U.S. officials involved in such work. The April multinational exercise hosted by the GOF's National Defense General Secretariat may provide such an opportunity.

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